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The Honorable George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

February 8, 2007

Dear Mr. President,

Thank you for your commitment to strengthening America's image and influence through the power of public diplomacy. Key elements of that effort specific to our relationship with the Islamic Republic of Iran are taxpayer-funded broadcasting services, such as Radio Farda, and Voice of America – Persian. However, I fear that our management of these services may actually be harming American interests rather than helping.

During a hearing I chaired last July entitled "Iran's Nuclear Impasse: Next Steps," several of our witnesses, including a prominent Iranian student leader who had recently escaped imprisonment in Iran, testified that United States broadcasts to Iran do more to undermine our foreign policy than support it. As a result, I began to investigate Voice of American Persian Service and Radio Farda. What I discovered was troubling—our broadcasts to Iran give a significant amount of airtime to guests and content that undermine U.S. policy on Iran, often even *supporting* the propaganda of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This conclusion is reinforced by reports we received from native Farsi speakers who monitor our broadcasts to Iran as well as last year's Iran Steering Group report commissioned by the Department of State and your National Security Council.

After bringing this to the attention of Chairman Ken Tomlinson at the Broadcasting Board of Governors and Ambassador Karen Hughes, who sits on the Board, we discovered that, among many other management problems, the Board is particularly limited in ability to oversee broadcasting content because there are no English transcripts of our international broadcasting.

Chairman Tomlinson personally assured me that the Board would require Voice of America Persian and Radio Farda to post full English transcripts of original programming on its website.

However, to date, that commitment has not been fulfilled. Even more troubling, Voice of America Persian coverage of your recent State of the Union speech suggests that more significant accountability reforms are needed at the Broadcasting Board of Governors. I have attached a copy of the transcript from this coverage, but for your convenience, here are a few excerpts:

- **State of the Union is a “baseless statement:”** One of the two guests invited by Voice of America Persian to analyze your speech, Dr. Mansour Farhang, uses a Farsi term best translated as “baseless statement” to describe your State of the Union speech. Dr. Farhang’s hostility is further expressed when he describes your Iraq policy as having “no connection to reality.”
- **“America opposes the President:”** The Voice of America anchor, Setareh Derakhshesh, editorializes that America opposes your policy in Iraq, including troop reinforcement. There is no poll cited or any other basis for the statement, but it is presented as fact.
- **U.S. is expanding the war in Iraq only to save face:** Dr. Farhang claims you have rejected the “wise diplomatic solution” to Iraq but are expanding the war in order to “not lose international clout.” He also claims the U.S. is to blame for increased violence and instability in Iraq. The only other guest, Hormuz Hekmat, who we are told was supposed to be the *balance* to Dr. Farhang, when asked, said he *agreed* with Farhang.

As you can see from the transcript, Voice of America failed to provide Iranians a clear and effective presentation of our foreign policy but provided another platform for its critics. Mr. President, this is only the most recent example of a much broader problem, not only in Iran, but throughout BBG broadcasting services.

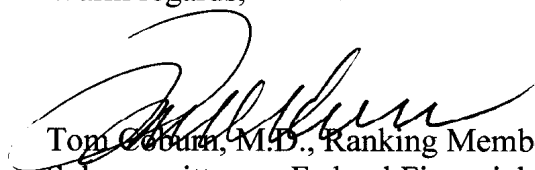
It has also come to my attention that other language services at the Broadcasting Board of Governors have similar problems. For example, it is reported last year alHurra, our Arabic broadcasting service, provided uninterrupted coverage of speeches delivered by two terrorist leaders, Hassan Nasrallah of Hezbollah on December 7 and Ismail Haniya of Hamas on December 19. It is also reported that alHurra did not provide similar wall-to-wall coverage to the speech of Palestinian Authority chairman Mahmoud Abbas delivered 3 days prior to Haniya’s speech.

In response to critics, the Broadcasting Board of Governors frequently provides examples of “balanced” content as showcase pieces to disprove accusations of anti-American content. Unfortunately, without a systematic review of all content, it is impossible to conclude that these cherry-picked examples are representative of any particular portion or all the content broadcast into Iran. The Board has not conducted a truly independent, six month analysis of U.S. programs aired in Iran similar to the Iran Steering Group. Unfortunately, due to the lack of transparency at the Broadcasting Board of Governors, it is difficult for anyone, including the Board, to conduct adequate and independent analysis of the content of our international broadcasting—especially if one is not a native speaker or watching the program live.

International broadcasting can be one of your most effective tools to communicate directly to citizens of countries that would otherwise not have access to a clear presentation of United States foreign policy. I urge you to carefully consider your nomination for the new Chairman of the Broadcasting Board of Governors as well as nominees for the other vacant seats on the Board. Our international broadcasting needs serious management and accountability reforms. Given the international challenges and threats to our national security, I believe it is vital that this important public diplomacy does not undermine your role as our lead diplomat. The status quo should not continue. For your reference, I have attached the transcript of Voice of America Persian's coverage of the State of the Union, a copy of the Iran Steering Group report, and a summary of the investigation I have conducted on the Broadcasting Board of Governors.

Thank you for looking into this matter and if I can ever be of assistance to you, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Warm regards,



Tom Coburn, M.D., Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Federal Financial
Management, Government Information, and
International Security
U.S. Committee on Homeland Security and
Governmental Affairs

Cc: Stephen Hadley, Ambassador Karen Hughes